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41ST ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

AB 604: Academic Excellence Scholarships
Testimony by State Representative Joan Ballweg
Assembly Committee on Colleges & Universities
February 3, 2010

Thank you Chair Hixson and members for holding a public hearing today on Assembly Bill 604.

Assembly Bill 604 makes a minor modification to the eligibility criteria for Wisconsin's Academic Excellence Higher Education Scholarship. The changes contained in this bill will improve the program.

It is my belief that the legislature should try to encourage Wisconsin's brightest students to stay in Wisconsin. This scholarship is one tool to help accomplish that goal. AB 604 seeks to remedy an inequity in the current program. Academic Excellence Scholarships are awarded to Wisconsin high school seniors who have the highest grade point average in each public and private high school throughout the State of Wisconsin.

The number of scholarships each high school is eligible for is based on total student enrollment. Scholarships are awarded to the senior with the highest grade point average from each high school with enrollment of at least 80 students, but not more than 500 students. For each additional 500 students in enrollment, the school is awarded an additional scholarship, up to a total of six scholarships for schools with 2,500 or more in enrollment.

In order to receive a scholarship, a student must be enrolled at a participating University of Wisconsin, Wisconsin Technical College, or independent institution in the state on a full-time basis by September 30 of the academic year following the academic year in which he or she was designated as a scholar.

The value of the scholarship is \$2,250 per year, to be applied towards tuition.

Half of the scholarship is funded by GPR, while the other half is matched by the participating Wisconsin higher education institution.

The Higher Educational Aids Board (HEAB) administers the scholarship and has tie-breaking criteria if two or more students have the same grade point average (G.P.A.) Under current law, if the certified scholar decides to enroll in a school outside of Wisconsin or declines the scholarship for whatever reason, and there is not an alternate with the identical Grade Point Average, the scholar with the next highest GPA may be certified as an Academic Excellence Scholarship scholar only if the school weights different courses differently.

Conversely, if a certified scholar declines the scholarship and there is not an alternate with the identical GPA and the school does not weight different courses differently, the scholarship is not awarded at that school that year.

This bill allows a senior with the next highest GPA (but not lower than 3.800) to be certified as a scholar if there is not an alternate with an identical GPA, regardless of how the high school weights its courses. Estimates predict that an additional 106 students would be eligible for the scholarship after this change.

Another provision in this bill changes the deadline for when a school must designate their scholar; it extends the date from February 15th to February 25th.

Both the Higher Education Aids Board and the University of Wisconsin System support this bill.

The changes in this bill are a simple issue of fairness and deserve your consideration.

I would appreciate your support on AB 604 and would be happy to answer any questions at this time.



Bill Position
Board of Regents - University of Wisconsin System
2009-10 Legislative Session

Assembly Bill 604 / Senate Bill 407
Academic Excellence Higher Education Scholarships

LEGISLATION

(Miller/Ballweg) Under current law, the Higher Educational Aids Board (HEAB) administers the Academic Excellence Higher Education Scholarships Program. HEAB awards scholarships to certain designated students who enroll on a full-time basis in a participating public or private institution of higher education. High school seniors with the highest grade point average in their class receive the award, with the maximum number varying according to the size of the school. Under current law, when two or more seniors from the same high school have the same grade point average, there is a mechanism to award the scholarship using a tie-breaker requiring high schools to weigh courses differently.

This bill would permit a senior with the next highest grade point, but not less than 3.800 or the equivalent, to be certified as an alternate and to receive a scholarship if a senior who is designated as a scholar or an alternate with the same grade point average does not enroll in a participating institution of higher education in all cases, regardless of how the high school weighs its courses.

UW SYSTEM POSITION

SUPPORT: This bill allows a minor expansion to the number of persons eligible to compete for the Academic Excellence Higher Education Scholarship program.

The scholarship currently provides each student with up to \$2,250 per year. This amount is one-half funded by GPR and one-half by the participating Wisconsin higher education institution. It is estimated that this bill would allow 106 additional students to be eligible for the scholarship. While it is impossible to estimate the number of eligible students who might choose to attend a UW System institution, the maximum fiscal impact of this bill on the UW System is estimated to be \$119,000 per year.

UW System supports efforts to provide high performing students with financial incentives to attend Wisconsin colleges and universities. However, state resources available for financial aid are already limited. With this in mind, UW System would support the expansion of need-based financial aid programs (or those awarded on a combination of merit and demonstrated family need), before committing additional resources to merit-based aid.